

Country Report: Uzbekistan
Intangible Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan

National Commission of Uzbekistan for UNESCO

1. Background of the project area

The notion of “oral and intangible cultural heritage” was defined by UNESCO as a complex of processes, knowledge, skills, experience and creativeness of any particular ethnic community, which include material objects, natural and human resources and also various aspects of social-cultural and natural-geographical character, necessary for identification of specific historical-ethnographical and cultural phenomena, which provide continuity for its development and preservation of cultural and creative diversity in the world community.

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Uzbekistan is a unique artistic phenomenon of the nation, which has ancient roots of traditional culture, including rituals, customs, folklore works, related to the art of word, music, spectacular performance, choreography, folk games, items of handicraft and applied arts. This heritage, coming through centuries-old history and transmitted in oral forms, crystallised in the creativity of many generations of remarkable singers and musicians, dancers and narrators, craftsmen and rope-walkers, in rich musical instruments, great folk epos, developed tonal-rhythmical system of maqom, song and instrumental samples, diverse folk dances, and artistic handicrafts.

Having developed over centuries, the ICH of Uzbekistan formed as a development of monodic culture, which has variety of forms, types and genres, richness of musical-expressive and visual measures. Wide public attention being paid to the ICH of Uzbeks at the present time is an indicator of the fact that the fate of traditional heritage and that of culture are indivisible. In the fully-operating culture the oral component is irreplaceable constituent. In this context, the role of ICH as one of significant stimuli for development of modern culture is increasing and this issue deserves great attention of the state and government, and public organisations and foundations as well.

State construction in Uzbekistan means revival of traditional spiritual values and cultural heritage of the nation. The UNESCO Programme of the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, which started in 2000, stimulated actions of the governments and public organisations for safeguarding and development of ICH.

One of the first joint activities of Uzbekistan with international organisations was “Revival of the Great Silk Road: Safeguarding of cultural heritage and development of cultural tourism”, which was initiated in 1994. After joining UNESCO, Uzbekistan was took and takes an active participation in all UNESCO programmes in the sphere of safeguarding and promotion of cultural heritage. Uzbekistan is one of the first countries in the Central Asian region, to ratify the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (November, 2007), which is the outcome of long-term efforts of UNESCO’s experts to establish an effective instrument for inventory-making and preservation of this segment of spiritual heritage of humanity.

2. Introduction of the target ICH

After Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, significant measures were taken in the sphere of safeguarding ICH, aimed at revival of its social and cultural importance in the society. Through years of realisation programmes for safeguarding ICH there was a project on reflection of the richness and diversity of cultural traditions of Uzbekistan, ensuring the continuity of historical and cultural processes, and promotion of dialogue between cultures of neighbouring countries.

In May 2001, the Cultural Space of the Boysun District in Surkhondaryo Region, along with 18 cultural objects was proclaimed as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This event became an important stimulus for supporting forms and genres of traditional culture in the whole Central Asian region and elaboration of a long-term strategy in the sphere of its safeguarding and further development.

In November 2003 Bukhara Shashmaqom traditional music, a phenomenon of the spiritual culture of Central Asia, was also proclaimed as Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, recognising of that its artistic and historic significance go beyond its region. For many centuries the notion of “maqom” became key to the traditional-professional music of the Orient. Nowadays Shashmaqom, and in a wider scale maqoms are not only preserved as spiritual heritage of the nation, but have also regained their former scale and value, and considering the popularity of oriental themes, they are influencing the world music. Two proclaimed items of the Masterpiece have various cultural past. Cultural Space of the Boysun District is a unique example of the rural form of traditional culture, while Shahmaqom music traditions are classical examples of the urban culture of Uzbekistan.

The Government of Uzbekistan, in close cooperation with UNESCO and public organisations and foundations, elaborated the pilot project on inventory and preservation of ICH. Joint activity should support revival of traditional ways of transferring ICH for future generations through “*Ustoz-Shogird*” (Master-student) traditional school. At present, nomination documents are being presented for inclusion of *Navruz* (public festival) and *Katta ashula* (unique song genre of Fergana valley) to the Representative List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity; materials on genres *Lapar* (original song genre), *Askiya* (art of witticism) and art of *Bakhshi* (storytellers of the national epos) are being prepared.

Criteria for revival of ICH of Uzbek people are: exclusive value, ancient sources of cultural tradition, originality of a manner of singing, mastery and skills of performance techniques, transmitted in oral tradition, cultural identity, uniqueness of live cultural tradition, source of an intercultural exchange and risk of disappearance. It was the problem of disappearance of some genres of ICH which determined the need for its preservation for the purpose of revival and development in conditions of the present, in order to transfer skills and knowledge of cultural heritage to future generation.

3. Objectives of the Project

The Project includes a number of necessary measures directed to resolution of basic problems of safety, revival, studying, propagation and transfer of traditions by means of preparation and gathering of database in all directions (archiving, inventory, documenting), publications of scientific materials, music collections and essays about bearers of traditions; preparation and release of audio and video discs, introduction of knowledge and skills in modern educational

process, organisation of master-classes, seminars, conferences and festivals-fairs of traditional art, involving youth in the realisation of the project.

Basic methods of realisation of the project were: carrying out expedition work on collection of the database in regions with participation of experts-scientists, bearers of traditions; studying archives of scientific research institutes, broadcasting companies, private collections, museums, etc.; research work (preparation of materials of scientific expeditions and scientific materials about genres of traditional culture and its bearers; practical activities (release of disks, films, organisation of contests, festivals, exhibitions-fairs, series TV and radio programmes); introduction of traditions and skills in educational process of colleges, conservatories, institutes of arts and culture, carrying out master-classes with attraction of bearers of traditions and modern masters; organisation and revival in the regions of traditional master-schools.

4. Methods of Project Implementation

At present, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On protection of cultural heritage properties” (2001) is being developed and amended. It will include separate articles about ICH: preservation and safeguarding, revival and development, scientific studying and practical development, articles about financial support for bearers of traditions. Principal factors: organisational and popularisation work by all means of communications, attraction of public foundations such as “Makhalla”, “Kamolot”, “Oltin Meros”, “Forum of Culture and Arts of Uzbekistan”, “Boysun”, to carrying out the contests, festivals, exhibitions of traditional culture, in particular, participation of youth and financial support for bearers of traditions; educational and scientific-research activity.

All governmental and public efforts are concentrated on innovative methods and area of preservation and development of ICH, for example, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On tax exemption for all kinds of activities in the field of manufacture of national craft products”, which has created favorable conditions for wider development of traditional arts (ceramics, textiles, carpet weaving, metal stamping, ganch and woodcarving and paintings, traditional clothes, musical instruments, jewelry, etc.).

In 2003-2008 a group of experts of the Academy of Arts, Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Culture and Sports organised some scientific expeditions for studying cultural forms of Boysun District, Fergana valley and Qashqadaryo Region, and Shashmaqom music traditions in various regions of Uzbekistan. Local hokimiyats (local authorities) and “Makhalla” Foundation offer legal support and pay great attention to development of ICH, establishing a so-called system of “Living treasure of humanity» (musicians, handicraftsmen, singers, storytellers, askiyachi and other bearers of traditions) among the public – organisation of Navruz festival, contests, national games.

5. Outcomes of the Project

Results of scientific expeditions and scientific research promoted release of some scientific publications:

- Proceedings of Boysun scientific expedition (No.1-3)
- The Atlas of Art Crafts of Boysun
- Traditional musical culture of Boysun
- Uzbek Musical Notation
- Fergana-Tashkent maqoms
- Uzbek maqoms – Shashmaqom
- History and traditional culture of Boysun and etc.

About 30 multimedia CDs, DVDs and digital sound recordings of “Boysun” and “Shashmaqom” have been produced since declaration of masterpieces of UNESCO. Since 2002, we have been organising “Boysun bahori” (“Spring of Boysun”) Open folklore festival in Boysun, since 2008 – festival of traditional culture “Asrlar sadosi” (“Echo of centuries”) in Qashqadaryo Region; and annually in all regions of Uzbekistan contests of young performers of maqom art and the national epos, contests of maqom and folklore ensembles, performers of katta ashula, askiya, lapar are organised.

School-Academy of Folklore, Center and Museum of National Creativity began functioning in Boysun, Boysun ceramic school of the Eshonkulovs has been revived; Art crafts of Samarkand, Rishton, Tashkent, Shakhriyabz, Kokand, Nurota, Urgut are being revived; “Doston” Ensemble in Khiva, is promoting art of national storytellers – bakhshi and khalfa; “Chorgokh” is a group of singers of katta ashula in Fergana; there are children’s maqom ensembles in Kokand, Samarkand, Tashkent. Master-classes (2005-2007) within the framework of “Sharq taronalari” (“Oriental Melodies”), International Music Festival in Samarkand, master-classes in the State Conservatoire of an Uzbekistan and in a number of musical colleges (Tashkent, Urgench, Bukhara, Samarkand, Fergana) are organised. Being based on recommendations of scientific expeditions, festivals and conferences, problems of traditional culture have been introduced in the formal education of the country, manuals in this field are being published. Within the framework of “Boysun bahori” and “Sharq taronalari” festivals, scientific conferences and seminars on ICH are organised.

The National Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan for UNESCO with assistance of the national TV and radio broadcasting company releases a number of documentary films on ICH which are broadcast on TV channels (Boysun, Shashmaqom, Lapar, Katta ashula, Navruz, Bakhshi, Askiya). A national non-governmental Organisation – Foundation of “Forum of Culture and Arts of Uzbekistan” (established five years ago) has attracted essential interest of the youth to traditional culture, for instance annual contests of various age groups of the young generation “Yangi avlod” (“New generation”) and “Kelajak ovozi” (“Voice of Future”).

6. Conclusion

More detailed research of genesis and development of ICH, problems of preservation and revival is still to be carried out, but we can already refer to some scientific revelation: for the first time the Boysun slip ceramics never mentioned in scientific literature, and manufactured Boysun clay nay-horns in the form of pipes, vessels and animals were revealed never earlier; So were Boysun dombra of the various sizes with a variety of playing methods, ceremony-doctoring “jakhr” and “sadr”, a number of works of “Shashmaqom”, records of “Uzbek notation”, and ceremonies and traditions of Navruz, which had not yet been covered in scientific literature.

Present strategy and the main line of actions of state policy in the field of preservation of ICH and based on preparation and acceptance of amendments in the current legislation in the field of protection and use of cultural heritage; development of mechanisms of support of all forms of traditional culture; inventory of ICH by means of collecting information, registration and research; revival of schools of mastery and inclusion of various forms of cultural heritage in the curriculum; attraction of the nongovernmental organisations, local communities and foundations for cooperation in the field of protection and development of ICH of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is interesting to multinational audience and first of all, Uzbek national culture, in which two basic layers are developing in coexistence and interaction: traditional and modern. The

concept of modern Uzbek art culture is not more identified only with creativity of modern composers, artists, poets, actors and musicians, because ICH also continues functioning. Nowadays traditional national art experiences the period of the bright revival. Thus, the activation of a traditional-national layer, sharply increased prestige of traditional-national forms of playing music and art crafts in many respects have changed general conditions in the music life of Uzbekistan, newly, historically more correct, where traditional culture is not only a heritage, but also the present.